

Selling Kosher Foods to France

By *Roselyne Gauthier*

Ten years ago, kosher foods in France were considered an ethnic niche market. Today, France is a major consumer of, and international trading center for, kosher foods.

Booming Market

France's Jewish community numbers about 700,000 people, and 80 percent are of Sephardic origin, which is heavily influenced by a Mediterranean-style diet. Almost half live in Paris and its suburbs, 15 percent are in Marseille and the remainder in large cities such as Lyon, Strasbourg and Toulouse.

The European kosher market is estimated at \$5 billion. In 2001, the French portion of this market was \$2.2 billion; it is expected to have reached \$2.5 billion in 2002. Adding to the potential of this market is the fact that kosher foods also are consumed by many non-Jews who consider kosher products to be healthy, high quality, natural and good tasting. For example, large companies such as Kellogg's, Haagen Dazs and Ben & Jerry's sell kosher products that are not restricted to kosher sections of supermarkets.

Among the Jewish community, the religious calendar drives kosher food consumption, with increased sales during the holidays of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkoth and the high holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Also, family events such as births, weddings, bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs contribute to increased kosher food consumption.

The non-Jewish community buys about 60 percent of all kosher foods sold in France. This group's consumption remains even throughout the year rather than seasonal. Vegetarians and consumers who are lactose-intolerant purchase significant amounts of kosher foods that do not contain meat or dairy products. Other consumers like the quality assurance provided by the kosher certification.

France is now the European center for kosher food sales, with more than 5,000 institutions buying kosher foods. The 10 largest French kosher food manufacturers distribute their products all over Europe. In general, locally manufactured kosher products are more price-competitive than imports.

However, both imported and domestic kosher products are found in kosher food sections of local supermarkets throughout Paris, Marseilles and Lyon. In



THE GALLIC MARKET OFFERS POTENTIAL FOR INCREASING SALES OF U.S. KOSHER FOODS.

In addition, numerous retail chains and specialty shops carry imported and domestic kosher items. France has two major kosher food chains, Naouri Cash Casher with 25 stores and HyperCasher with 5 stores.

Plethora of Products

In the Paris metropolitan area, a typical kosher store carries a variety of pastries, condiments, cheeses, olives and wines. France's Jewish community consumes significant amounts of wines, and there are more than 160 kosher wines produced and sold in France.

American brand products found in kosher stores include Kedem grape juice, Rokeach gefilte fish, Pasksez candies and snack foods and Gefen grocery products. Producers are launching kosher versions of biscuits, dairy foods, candies and even organic, health and specialty ethnic foods.

U.S. kosher foods with good sales prospects in France include matzos, sauces, snacks, soups, crackers, vegetarian items, citrus products and wines.

Retail prices for kosher foods generally run about 15-20 percent higher than prices for non-kosher products. Most imported kosher foods are from Israel, but there is potential for increasing sales of U.S. kosher foods.

In France, the food service industry is booming, and kosher catering in some large establishments, including Servair, France's dominant airline caterer, represents 10-12 percent of overall business. In addition, kosher food has become so popular in France that a glossy kosher food magazine called *Le Cachère* now reaches more than 30,000 people.

A good way for a U.S. company to promote the sale of kosher foods in France and the rest of Europe is to display



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products at the EuroKosher or SIAL food shows. EuroKosher, the only kosher food show in Europe, is held every two years, with the next one tentatively scheduled for Paris in June 2004. SIAL Paris is held every even year in October.

Kosher Product Requirements

The Beth-Din Jewish Community Court of Law controls the certification of kosher foods in France. This institution identifies and verifies the products and also inspects the manufacturing establishments.

Kosher products also must comply with all French import regulations in the areas of packaging, labeling and customs duties. Labels must be in French. Kosher in that language can be translated as *kasher*, *casher*, *cashère* or *cacher*.

In order to be recognized as kosher, products must have the "K" identification on the label with the name of the rabbi who certified the product. Labels also must include the following information:

- Product definition
- Shelf life
- Usage instructions
- Weights and volumes of ingredients in metric

- All additives, preservatives and color agents, with their specific group names
- Country of origin and name of importer in the European Union
- Manufacturer's lot or batch number

For delicatessen products, there are additional requirements: the word *casher* must appear in both French and Hebrew, plus the name of the certifying rabbi and his city of residence.

As always, it is advisable for U.S. exporters to develop a close working relationship with a reputable French importer to facilitate the customs process. ■

The author is an agricultural specialist in the FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Paris, France. For more information, or assistance in entering the French kosher market, contact that office at: Tél.: (011-33-1) 4312-2264; Fax: (011-33-1) 4312-2662; E-mail: agparis@fas.usda.gov

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